

Philosophy of Death in the Western Philosophical and Islamic Traditions: A Case Study of Heidegger

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Abstract

"Death" has been an important theme of exploration in religions, philosophies and among common men as well. All agreed on its inevitability but anticipation and attitude towards acceptance of death has been discussed differently in philosophy and religion. The discourse on death has been an important aspect of Western philosophical tradition since ancient times which is clearly lacking in modern philosophy except in Schopenhauer's pessimism and then again noticeable in the existentialist enterprise. However, among existentialists, Heidegger is distinguished by treating death as his personal commitment. By avoiding any transcendental explanation, Heidegger presented an ontological inquiry into the nature of death. Interwoven with complicated terminology, Heidegger personalized death with freedom to choose one's way of dying which he characterized as authentic-being-towards-death. His emphasis on freedom gave the human valiant godly status, fearless, making new discoveries, inventions and defining his way of dying. His fellow existentialists, such as Sartre, criticized his philosophy of death. On the other hand, the nature of death being discussed in Islam is different. Islam personalizes death but gives the authority of ceasing life in the hand of God. By emphasizing the importance of the belief on Judgment Day, Islamic teachings hold a person accountable for his/her deeds before God and provokes him/her to be moderate and pious in this world which will end one day. The paper is an attempt to comprehend the key differences between Western philosophical tradition and Islamic tradition in the discourse and understanding of death.

Keywords: Death, Existentialism, Extension of life, Resurrection

Part I

a) Greek and Modern Philosophical Discourse on Death

Death, the ultimate end, the conclusion, though unpleasant, is a universally accepted fact and is as important as existence. Every living object of the world is bound to move towards its end and to surrender itself in the face of death. A certain kind of fear of death is inherent in human beings but there is little doubt that the modern man's mind is more occupied with greater 'anguish' with regard to death than did the men of primitive times. The anticipation of death and its meaning for human beings is far more than merely the ending of life. The 'anguish', 'fear' and anticipation of death has not only found a position in theology but got a significant place in philosophy from ancient times to the modern and then postmodern philosophies.

Socrates defined philosophy as the "the pursuit of death"¹ which was largely approved by the intellectuals and philosophers of later periods. Hellenistic philosopher Epicurus is frequently quoted for his famous saying, "death doesn't exist as he uttered 'while we live, death is absent; when we die, we are absent, so death simply doesn't exist for us.'"² Epicureans find death deprived of sensation and pleasure. That is why they rightly declared that death meant nothing to them and therefore, "a right understanding, that death is nothing to us, makes the mortality of life enjoyable..."³ and also saves us from any terrible experience in an afterlife.⁴

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While on the other hand for Stoics, death “is the way of saying thank you to life.”⁵ They were of the view of living everyday as the last day of life. Therefore, they say that “death is not to be feared but the idea is to be used... for transforming our lives.”⁶ Roman Stoics however, were advocates of suicide somehow, as they believed, “suicide is sometimes a right action for the wise person, and some considered it a duty in circumstances that prevented living a virtuous life, as in situations in which the bulk of one’s circumstances are not in accord with nature”.⁷

The focus and discussion on the reality of death in ancient philosophy almost disappeared in the wake of the praise of human endeavors in post Renaissance modern times, and Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) had to declare, “death having no reality and one should meditate only upon essentials, upon eternal things, for by doing so one will become like the eternal: calm, self-sufficient, happy, indestructible, free. One will be directed in everything by reason, which cannot pass away. Thus death is of no consequence to free man and no fit problem for philosophical meditation,”⁸ as he viewed, “a free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is not a meditation upon death but upon life”.⁹ Though the rationalists did not consider that death should be discussed a philosophical problem but even they could not completely deny it. The philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) is one of the most important examples in presenting the gloomy picture of death which, according to some thinkers, resembles that of the Epicureans.¹⁰

Pessimism, which is a distinguishing mark in the thought of Schopenhauer, is also evident in his philosophy of death. He is of the view that life and death are reciprocal not opposite, only small and limited minds fear death and this fear and horrification leads to depression in life.¹¹ For Schopenhauer, death is inevitable, unreal and the aim of life while existence is suffering and constant dying.¹² He calls “death a welcome release from the individual will’s condemnation to a life of ineffectual suffering.”¹³ Schopenhauer eulogizes that an individual’s existence is caught up in the flow of time whereby time is continually streaming into the past.¹⁴ Schopenhauer was accused being nihilist for defining life as value-less and ethically unimportant but in fact he asserted that life has meaning and this significance lies in being unenthusiastic and negative. To deal with this situation, he presented a solution by dividing life into two approaches, i.e., ‘the aesthetic and the ascetic approaches’. Aesthetic approach coins every faculty of arts, like music, painting, poetry, drama and natural beauty which help an individual to get away from anguish and misery, but this escape from the master plan of the will’s anxiety and torment is temporary. The permanent solution is asceticism in which a person rejects the world with its attachments through the ways of severe and farthest self-denial and frugality by accepting scarcity and poverty, and the purpose of such painful life is to kill the depression and striving of the will. He specifically notified the version of Nirvana which is “an escape from the world into the pure form and hence a triumph over the will... which Plato and the Buddha were clumsily struggling.”¹⁵

Schopenhauer’s philosophy of death is not widely discussed and not recommended for being pessimistic. The fact of death which is irreversible destruction of the self was rediscovered differently by the existentialistic enterprise. They considered awareness of death as gaining illumination of the world.

b) Existentialist Philosophy of Death

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), ‘Father of Existentialism contributed his literary work on *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844), and *The Sickness unto Death* (1849).

He also ridiculed the systems of Hegel. Existence is very important for Kierkegaard as it “constitutes the highest interest of the existing individual, and his interest in his existence constitutes his reality.”¹⁶ He asserted on enthusiastic and ethical existence to create opportunities for oneself and when a person lacks all meanings in his life, he meets faces anxiety and despair. Due to this emphasis on despair, Kierkegaard’s philosophy of death is considered morbid and pessimist.¹⁷

For Kierkegaard, death is inherent,¹⁸ uncertain and a thing of despair which brings an end to his existence. “He preferred to say that “death is the self-denial in this life”.¹⁹ In his work, *Sickness unto Death*, he explained that “it literally means a sickness to the end and the outcome of which is death”.²⁰ For him, “dying the death means to live to experience death.”²¹ He considered that the worst and actual anguish is the one when one cannot die peacefully. Death is the subjective truth which cannot be experienced, grasped, communicated or explained directly because of its uncertainty. Kierkegaard believed on the idea that, “one’s view of death is very much linked to one’s total view of existence.”²² He criticized the Danish Christian theology of personal immortality and afterlife by considering the fact that “there is no proof but only the consequences of the option we choose to accept.”²³

Different scholars describe the Kierkegaardian existentially dead-man into ‘Zombies’ as a “living death of despair or sinful separation from the divine, in all its manifestation.”²⁴ By death, Kierkegaard is, in fact, provoking self-awareness in man. By his “retroactive power of death”²⁵ he acknowledged that even a mute thinking and little understanding of death is closely communicated to the goal of living well. We can’t acknowledge our own non-being state without considering death as an existential dilemma for existing which can shape our existential and subjective truths; this is the purpose of Kierkegaard’s concept of death.

c) Personalized, Non-Relational possibility of Death in Heidegger

Diverging from the path of existential analysis which Kierkegaard took in discussing the problem of death, Heidegger preferred to present an ontological inquiry. The concept of death in Heidegger’s philosophy is more comprehensive than in any other existentialist and inclusive terminologies that have been used to elaborate the concept.

To date, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is one of the towering figures of postmodern Western philosophical tradition. Influenced by the phenomenology of Husserl as a disciple, he was also greatly inspired by Nietzsche. Not merely an inspiration, Heidegger gave an illuminating and different interpretation to Nietzsche’s philosophy of language and art. He not only earned his name among the most prominent existentialists by coining new terms, inventing new spellings, using word play and giving new dimensions to philosophy of existentialists but also put criticism on his predecessors in his magnum opus *Being and Time*.²⁶ Heidegger’s concept of death cannot be understood without an understanding of his existential philosophy argued in the 1st division of *Being and Time*.

In the 1st division of the 1st part of *Being and Time*, he argued, “the Being of Dasein” in every perspective and tried to prove Dasein, both ontically (scientifically and traditionally) and ontologically. Heidegger interpreted different essential traits of his ideal human being and discussed Dasein by its Being, where for Heidegger, “Being lies in the fact that something is, and in its Being as it is; in Reality; in presence-at-hand; in subsistence; invalidity; in Dasein; in the ‘there is.’”²⁷ In his own words, Dasein “make an entity-the inquirer-transparent in his

own Being,”²⁸ as a “mode of Being”²⁹ so the meaning of Being lies among human beings, who themselves hold, is called Dasein, having extraordinary uniqueness from other entities, aware of its own Being, behaves itself as the responsive of its existence, and understands personally itself as ‘Existentiell’, where “Existentiell refers to someone's personal understanding of their own existence.”³⁰ The Dasein in Heidegger’s description is not just the representation of the human being but the one who signs the hidden potentialities and self-realization which want to come forward before the world to prove its existence, its importance, and its benefits for the world. He believed that ‘Dasein’s essence lies in its existence’, where “Existence means a potentiality-for-Being-but also which is authentic.”³¹

Heidegger wants for Dasein to fulfill its personal commitment of having the power to live in its own and by its own existence of what it wants to do which is in turn determined by a person’s actions and distinct efforts. The *authentic* existence of Dasein in this world is not the only commitment for Heidegger but having the power to die authentically, i.e., *authentic being-towards-death* is also a part of Heidegger’s personal commitment. For him it is personal freedom along with a personal right. This commitment is very well explained by Heidegger in the second division of *Time and Being*. He solidified the temporality of Dasein by the certainty that all Being is a *Being-toward-death* and that, “The ‘end’ of Being-in-the-world is death”.³² Heidegger considers death is at once “the most personal, the most detached, unrelated, and unsurpassable potentiality”.³³ It is a way to be, not a way to an end.

In Heidegger’s existential analysis, the “end” of death is not something which one directly apprehends or experiences. Heidegger argued death as *Being-towards-death* to disclose Dasein’s ontological characterization of possibility which makes death not just an everyday-event but as an irrefutable fact of experience of worth living and worth realization. For him, if Dasein is purely a life, then Dasein is also purely death. Life and death are not two opposite forces; rather they are two corners of a single thread. His existential-ontological conception of death can be defined in these words, “Death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein’s *ownmost possibility, non-relational, certain* and as such *indefinite, not to be outstripped*. Death is, as Dasein’s end, in the Being of this entity towards its end.”³⁴

It is important to note that to elaborate the concept of death of Dasein, Heidegger used interrelated terminology. The terms of “*own-most potentiality-for-being*”, “*non-relational*”, and “*not to be out-stripped*” describe the threefold, simultaneous character of death³⁵ and are central to understanding Heidegger’s philosophy of death. The first requirement in becoming aware of death as a possibility is to recognize that death is always and ever my own, something that belongs to my very essence, as Nothingness belongs to Being.³⁶ No one can take my place in death, nor can I, in this sense, ever die for another. I always die alone and the very meaning of death to me, according to Heidegger, is attained only in contemplation of my own death.³⁷

Heidegger not only accepted death’s indefiniteness, but also differed by saying that, “dying, which is essentially mine in such a way that no one can be my representative, is perverted into an event of public occurrence which the ‘they’ encounters”³⁸ by three ways: temptation, tranquilization, and alienation. He made important distinction between *Inauthentic Being towards-death* and *Authentic Being-towards-death*. For Heidegger, “*inauthenticity* characterizes a kind of being into which Dasein can divert itself and has for the most part always diverted itself.”³⁹ The *inauthentic being-towards-death* is characterized by the mode of the ‘*they-self*.’ The ‘*they-self*’ treats death as an actuality, not a possibility, by seducing us to convince ourselves that death is not really our own, but an event experienced by others,

tranquillizing ourselves against death-awareness and alienating us from our authentic self by concealing death. "Our everyday falling evasion in *the face of death* is an *inauthentic being-towards-death*. But *inauthenticity* is based on the possibility of authenticity."⁴⁰

Authentic being-towards-death cannot escape its *own-most non-relational possibility*, or cover up this possibility by thus fleeing from it, or *give a new explanation* for it to accord with the common sense of the 'they'.⁴¹ The difference between *authentic and inauthentic being towards-death* rests upon the difference between *possibility* and *actuality*. Death remains always a possibility which cannot be actualized as humans actualize their dreams, wishes, probabilities, opportunities, and passions. In *authentic Being-towards-death*, possibility "must not be weakened": it must be "understood", "cultivated" "put up with" as possibility.⁴² For Heidegger, to be fully aware of one's ability to be is to exist authentically. A person's "authentic Being-towards-death is a matter of stripping out false necessities and becoming properly attuned to the real modalities of human existence."⁴³ *Authentic being* is the key issue for both Heidegger and Dasein; this is what inspires Heidegger with various probabilities of living-styles, and means an 'existentiell possibility of Dasein'.⁴⁴ Heidegger familiarized two phenomena of possibilities to understand death; *Expecting and Anticipation* (Heidegger focused on anticipation) where he chose anticipation over expectation.

The difference between *expecting* and *anticipating* also explains the difference between authentic and inauthentic Being-towards-death. "Expecting is essentially a waiting for the actualization,"⁴⁵ because "it is for its actuality that what is expected is expected."⁴⁶ And anticipation defined by Heidegger is as, "the closest closeness which one may have in being towards death as a possibility, is as far as possible from anything actual."⁴⁷ This possibility reveals itself "as the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all,"⁴⁸ which tells us about his negation of afterlife, and makes him believe that it is impossible to do anything with death but still it can be measured as a possibility. Then, "*Being-towards-death*, as anticipation of possibility, is what first makes this possibility possible, and sets it free as possibility."⁴⁹

Heidegger attempted to keep death as a possibility and anticipation is the only way for making death free from it. Anticipation is "the possibility of understanding one's own most and uttermost *potentiality-for-Being-* that is to say, the possibility of *authentic existence*".⁵⁰ Thus, the phenomenon of death reveals *authentic Dasein*. The '*anticipation of death*' may have more than one explanations; this term is believed to be the incentive for suicide, others argued upon it as an exploring impulse inside man as finding the road of adventures, discoveries and explorations beyond this universe. Many others considered it a compulsion of death as an awareness of it.

The meanings and definition of authentic *Being-towards-death* and *anticipation* is directly connected to the final important term in Heidegger's philosophy of death, i.e., *freedom towards death*. *Freedom* for him is to comprehend that we are capable of being and not-being. By "anticipation, one becomes free for one's own death, one is liberated from one's lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally thrust themselves upon one; and one is liberated in such a way that for the first time one can authentically understand and choose among the factual possibilities lying ahead of that possibility which is not to be outstripped."⁵¹ This freedom informs us about the *authentic Being-towards-death* by explaining that Dasein can choose its own death as having its *Being-towards-death*. So authentic Being-towards-death having *freedom* can be summarized in the words of Heidegger as:

“anticipation reveals to dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, rather, it is an impassioned freedom towards death --- a freedom which has been released from the illusion of the “they”, and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious.”⁵²

If the complex and interwoven terminology of death in Heidegger's thought is to be summed up, then it can be noted that Heidegger believed that death is the only certain-possibility which a man can have in any time. The characterization of *ownmost* and *non-relational* describes that death comes to knowledge internally with the origin of life, known as birth; while the knowing of certainty and indefiniteness of death emanates externally by watching other's deaths, irrespective to culture, religion or era. Heidegger did not prefer to define death existentially in order to shatter traditional concept of judging death as external phenomenon. Instead, he gave the challenging explanation by fitting two opposite phenomena in the same strand, and added certainty and indefiniteness along with the feature of ‘*not to be outstripped*’ in the arguments to define Dasein's basic state. Remarkably putting together all existential characteristics of death, he defined them in terms of Dasein's inner experiences with its everydayness. His whole philosophy of death revolves around three key-points;

- “No one can take the Other's dying away from him.”⁵³
- “With its death, Dasein has indeed ‘fulfilled its course’.”⁵⁴
- “Death is a possibility-of-Being which Dasein itself has to take over in every case. With death, Dasein stands before itself in its *ownmost* potentiality-for-Being.”⁵⁵

The main purpose of Heidegger was the disclosure of Dasein via death, because an *authentic Being* of Dasein can be formed by individualizing death in its own accord by itself and for itself. Heideggerian treatment and the existentialistic idea of death make death special and personalized. Heidegger was criticized by his successors in the strongest terms for defining death as a possibility.

d) Existentialist Critique of Heidegger

Jean Paul Sartre criticized Heidegger in the strongest terms in his *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and denied his concept that “death belongs to the ontological structure of Dasein.”⁵⁶ For Sartre, death is accidental in its occurrence and, therefore, absurd. He boldly asserts that death is no annihilation and only human consciousness in its freedom can constitute meaning to it. Though he does not deny the reality of death but he does not think it is particularly important.⁵⁷ “Death is not a possibility of my being but an always possible *situation* involving the negation of my possibilities.”⁵⁸ The fate of the dead is always in the hands of the living. Death is the lapse of the subjectivity of man out of the world. “I leave behind meanings and traces.”⁵⁹

Death is just a limit and a conditional reality in terms of absolute fate, and also an agreement of being free for Sartre. But he treats death differently than Heidegger. Heidegger makes no distinction between death and finitude, while Sartre based freedom on finitude as an internal factor of life and considered death as external to individuality because of its inevitability. Heidegger based anxiety and fear on death, while Sartre based anxiety on an unsatisfied desire of being God. Sartre makes a distinction between nothingness and death while Heidegger didn't. After the great philosophical impact of Sartre's emphasis on freedom of

choice, it is being considerably widespread that, "One implication is that we can change the course of history-a controversial but exciting idea,"⁶⁰ by making small changes of choice.

Karl Jasper (1883-1969), another German existentialist and contemporary of Heidegger, criticizes the general attitude of men for not considering death as cause for concern. The constant presence of one's future death is an inherent part of the human condition and it confronts everyone with the fact that one has to die.⁶¹ Karl Jaspers has named death as "boundary situation."⁶² The ultimate boundary situation or the most extreme spiritual exposure is the exposure to death, and it is the most impenetrable of the boundary situations. It is the one which makes shipwreck of all human life inevitable. Death belongs to the human situation as such and to the situation of each individual. For Jaspers, to make our death an event of great importance is the "vivid realization of death as a constitutive part of life, not as a mere end of life. Death is a phenomenon within life. If it is taken into life in a personal way, it will affect a revolution in our behavior".⁶³ Another way of combating the 'vital fear' of death, according to Jaspers, is to ignore the worldly aspect of the self and immerse oneself in a transcendent realm, as some mystics do, or yield to nihilistic despair. But Jaspers asserts that in confronting one's own death, one must not leave the world, so to speak.⁶⁴

It is also evident that for Heidegger, death is the undeniable reality and is important, but his concept and philosophy is temporal, not concerned with what happens afterwards. In his philosophical inquiry of death, Heidegger has avoided any transcendental explanations and tried to make Dasein fearless. The question and philosophy of death is, however, dealt differently in religious traditions from the philosophical tradition.

Part II

a) Islamic Concept of Death: An Extension of Life

The nature of the concept of death in religions is more connected to the spirituality of individuals. It is more concerned with the hereafter rather than here and now as in the existentialist enterprise. Islam like other Abrahamic religions declares death as the paramount reality of life. The injunctions laid down in the Holy book of Qur'ān emphasize the certainty of death to be faced by every living being. "Every soul shall have a taste of death."⁶⁵ It is accentuated that the reality of death cannot be escaped in anyway, a person residing in high towers or in the depths of the ocean will also face death;⁶⁶ "Running away will not profit you if ye are running away from death or slaughter; and even if (ye do escape), no more than a brief (respite) will ye be allowed to enjoy!"⁶⁷ While explaining the meaning of the verse, most putative exegete of the Qur'ān, Ibn Kathir writes: "Then Allah tells them that fleeing from battle will not delay their appointed demise or make their lives any longer; on the contrary, it may be the cause of their being taken sooner, and in a sudden manner."⁶⁸

Islamic teachings not only approve death as a biological process which brings an end to the life of all living beings but also affirm God as the sole authority of ceasing life of all living beings as He is also the only Creator. "He is the Creator of everything, dead or living."⁶⁹ It is mentioned in the explanation of this verse that God named the first stage, which is non-existence, 'death', and then he named the origin or beginning of existence, 'life.' Death, in this way, is eternal and everywhere, and is destined with every living being and ends with a life, not as a negation but as a different kind of form and appearance. It solely resides with God to take back life of someone at any stage of life and let others grow old. "It is Allah who

creates you and takes your souls at **death**; and of you there are some who are sent back to a feeble age, so that they know nothing after having known (much): for Allah is All-Knowing, All-Powerful.”⁷⁰ When the authority of taking life is in God’s hand and the life is the trust entrusted to humans, suicide is strictly prohibited in Qur’ānic injunctions. “... and do not kill yourself”.⁷¹ The ones who take their lives by themselves have been warned of a painful doom in prophetic traditions as the words of the Prophet quoted, “whoever killed himself in the world with anything, then Allah will punish him by that same thing on the Day of Judgment.”⁷²

The Qur’ān explains the process of coming to life, death and resurrection as gradual, created by God only. “He it is Who made you from dust, then from sperm drop, then from a clot of blood, then He brings you forth as an infant, then He causes you to live so that you may attain to your maturity then that you may become old, and some of you are caused to die before and that you may reach to an appointed promise and that you may learn. He is He who gives life and causes death.”⁷³

These verses describe the stages of life to death in details, where death is being described as universal. However, distinctions have been made of the death experiences of different kinds of people on the basis of their existence in the world. “What, do those who seek after evil ways think that We shall hold them equal with those who believe and do righteous deeds, - that will be their life and their death? Bad is their judgment.”⁷⁴ This verse suggests death a distinctive, personal and individualistic, as a differentiation mark between wrong-doers and pious ones, explaining both universal and individual deaths. The Qur’ān didn’t leave the part of distinctive death’s experiencing of a believer and a non-believer, such: “(Namely) those whose lives the angels take in a state of purity, saying (to them), ‘Peace be on you, enter the Garden because of (the good) which you did (in the world).’”⁷⁵

The experience of the coming of death is mentioned as painful and not the quicker according to Islamic beliefs, unlike the belief of nothingness in ancient civilizations. It is mentioned in the Qur’ān that death is like a sore and throbbing extraction from a life-dwelled cage of stinging bars. Even its taste of pain is different among men, and this explains the gradation of its understanding inside humans. There are more than one verses in the Holy Qur’ān that indicate the action of giving death performed by death giving angels on the command of God.⁷⁶ This idea portrays the death-giving angel as ‘Grim-Reaper’, a civilizational figure of death-giver, especially a character of dark ages. But Islam verifies this idea of the life-snatcher angel such as “Say: ‘The angel of Death, put in charge of you, will (duly) take your souls; then shall you be brought back to your Lord.’”⁷⁷

It is believed among Muslims that the soul is being pulled out in the form of a feather-like light breadth during the process of dying. “But He fashioned him in due proportion, and breathed into him of His spirit.”⁷⁸ However, a differentiation has been made between two kinds of soul by Muslim exegetes’ in the light of verses mentioned in the Qur’ān, i.e., divine-soul and animated-soul. Animated-soul is the breadth of life which never stops till death, even during sleep, and divine-soul is the creation-echo (not the part of God) of life from Allah. “It is Allah that takes the souls (of men) at death; and those that die not (He takes) during their sleep, those on whom He has passed the decree of death, He keeps back (from returning to life), but the rest He sends (to their bodies) for a term appointed.”⁷⁹ In this verse, sleep is defined as a temporary death. The truth is that “Allah causes men to die (the greater death) when He sends the angels to take men's souls from their bodies, and He

causes them to “die a lesser death” when they sleep.”⁸⁰ This temporary death is being described as ‘lesser death’, by which only with the permission of God one can wake up.

The optimistic ideology of death in Islam provoking consequentialistic attitudes replaced the pessimistic ideological mythology of ancient times that considered the world as endlessly-living, and being under an impersonal Divine-Force having no concern for the welfare of human beings. To accept death in Islam is different from all other Semitic and Non-Semitic religions. Death is not a karmic-circle as in Hinduism and Buddhism but a waiting to rise again for living a permanent life based on moral actions according to Islamic creed-classification. All Semitic religions such as Judaism and Christianity resemble Islamic philosophy in accepting the belief of resurrection but they do not emphasize on the hereafter and the Day of Judgment.

b) Resurrection of Man on the Day of Judgment

Belief regarding “Hereafter” and the “Day of Judgment” is broadly termed as “*ākhirah*” which is more comprehensive in meaning as it conveys the meaning of resurrection and other subsequent steps mentioned in the Qur’ān and the traditions of the Prophet (Peace be upon Him). To make people realize the importance of death and the life afterwards, the worth of this world is being very much belittled by God. Life in this world is only the enjoyment of deception, temporary and that (Hereafter) “which is with God is better and will remain forever.”⁸¹ It is over and again emphasized in the traditions of the Prophet (peace be upon Him) that the reality of the world is like a drop of water of an ocean as compared to life in the hereafter. Therefore, a person should spend his/her life like a traveler always ready to leave this world. The logical consequence of being always ready to meet the Lord would be that a man must not have long hopes and endless desires as Prophet (peace be upon Him) advised not to love this world. Love of this temporary world evokes limitless wishes and one always wants to live in this world. Therefore, a difference has been made between the one who is happy to meet His Lord and one who is unhappy to meet His Lord in Hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon Him):

“Whoever loves to meet Allah, Allah will love to meet him, and whoever hates to meet Allah, Allah will hate to meet him.” ‘Āyishah (May God be pleased with her) or one of his wives said: “But we all dislike the idea of death.” He said, “It is not what you are thinking. When death approaches the believer and he is given the news of Allah’s pleasure and honour, nothing will be dearer to him than what lies ahead of him, so he will love to meet Allah and Allah will love to meet him. But when death approaches the disbeliever and he is given the news of Allah’s wrath and punishment, nothing will be more disliked by him than that what lies ahead of him, so he will hate to meet Allah and Allah will hate to meet him.”⁸²

For this very reason, belief in the Day of Judgment is one of the essential and primary beliefs of a Muslim without which the faith of a Muslim cannot be completed. Accordingly, every Muslim believes that God will judge the actions of every living being on the Day of Judgment, the knowledge of which is only with God,⁸³ and accordingly the destiny of living beings will be decided. Hell and paradise will be the final dwelling places for non-believers and believers. The word of God describes,

“Every soul shall have a taste of death: and only on the Day of Judgment shall you be paid your full recompense. Only he who is saved far from the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have attained the object (of Life): for the life of this world is but goods and chattels of deception.”⁸⁴

Therefore, Qur’ānic injunctions and Prophetic traditions make distinctions between believers and non-believers facing the Day of Judgments and receiving the verdicts based on their actions performed in the worldly life. The believers will be given their records of deeds in their right hand while the disbelievers and evil doers will have their records in their left hands. The condition of wretched people when their Record (of deeds) will be given in their left hand is mentioned in these words, “(He) will say: “I wish that I had not been given my Record! And that I had never known how my account is! Would that it had been my end!...”⁸⁵ The pleasure of the believers will be evident from their faces as they will be given their record in their right hands. “And for those whose faces will become white, they will be in Allah's mercy (Paradise), therein they shall dwell forever.”⁸⁶

To have good judgments, therefore it is stressed to kill one’s evil intentions and doing right deeds in the world. The much discussed tradition among sufis and mystics of Islam is the “Die before you have to face the death”⁸⁷ as the achievement of attaining spiritual union with the divine.”⁸⁸ So, “Sufis taught that death obliges seekers to engage in greater self-scrutiny, as the qualities of life after death reflect those of their worldly existence.”⁸⁹

“For the Sufis, death is something to look forward to, because this is the way of becoming part of the divine totality and the ultimate reality. In sum, the meaning of death for the Sufis is the return of the soul to the universal totality and being one with the deity. The physical body decays and decomposes at death, but the individual consciousnesses absorbed in this ultimate reality returns to its original source, which is infinite and eternal. The highest level of consciousness is the experience of the absorption of one’s soul into the divine source.”⁹⁰

Most reliable exegetes of the Qur’ān, the sacred scripture of Muslims, quote this saying to advise believers to kill their worldly desires before death takes them away and there is no time left to do good deeds. It also means to hold one’s self accountable before being accountable by God. The Islamic concept of death has meaning and importance as a journey to the next level of living-dead waiting for Resurrection by the ideology of ‘*Akhirah*’. Therefore, life is being defined by death in Islamic teaching where an individual is provided a peaceful purpose to form a nonviolent, active and moderate society which in turn defines his relationship with God, and with his fellow human beings, irrespective of race, class, color and creed.

c) Comparative Analysis of Islamic Concept of Death and Heidegger

Freedom which is the core feature of Heidegger’s philosophy, made him believe that death is identified with freedom. This freedom makes human beings free from the influence and the world of the ‘*they*’; freedom provokes them to do something innovative before the realization of death or the coming of it, and creates a desire to be unique from the choices of others. While on the other hand, Islamic concept of death makes a distinction of morally mystical good and bad death as mentioned earlier which further personalizes the individual’s

reward by satisfying his desires in legal-way possible; this is the only thing which separates human beings from the Angel and the devil.

Death has been personalized in Heidegger based on the individual's choice of how one can die. Islamic teachings personalize death of an individual but place life and taking it back in the hand of God. Heidegger defines life as full of potentiality of inventions and discoveries defining one's authentic-being-towards death, while Islam defines death to form life. Death is a source of ethical actualization and responsible life, giving significance and definition to life. Without death, man has no choice and would be slave of predestination. The teachings of Islam hold an individual accountable for his/her actions and attitude towards others on the Day of Judgment. Therefore, a person must devise the course of life according to divine laws fearing God only and this aspect is absent in the philosophy of Heidegger. The negation of Divine authority also negates an afterlife, a rewarded heaven and hell and also distinct experiences of death of believers and non-believers. Heidegger defined death as a realization caused by the anxiety and anguish in life, and Islam explains death's anguished and painful experience during the process of dying and after-death, either in graves or on Judgment Day on the basis of one's deeds in the world. Islamic tradition explains death in a monotheistic parameter, while Heidegger defines death in atheistic limitation.

By placing the authority of giving life and taking it back in God's hand, Islamic injunctions do not allow Euthanasia which ultimately increases the ratio of suicide. Its legitimization is not allowed even in the worst conditions. Islam however, consoles humans by declaring all calamities as trials by God and also promises reward for these calamities.

“Were it not that Allah treats His slaves with the remedy of trials and calamities, they would transgress and overstep the mark. When Allah wills good for His slaves, He gives him the medicine of calamities and trials according to his situation, so as to cure him from all fatal illnesses and diseases, until He purifies and cleanses him, and then makes him qualified for the most honorable position in this world, which is that of being a true slave of Allah (*‘ubūdiyyah*), and for the greatest reward in the Hereafter, which is that of seeing Him and being close to Him.”⁹¹

Heidegger explained death as nothingness in the absence of space-time while Islam described death in another dimensional space-time world. Death has been explained as an experience and a kind of fear for survival in Heidegger and in Islam. But both philosophies aspire for human beings to live their lives by using their potentialities and realizing their responsibilities. However, the sources of this understanding for both philosophies are different and opposite. Islam reforms man into a religious and social form with limited desires. Islam wishes man to fear the One God only and directs every discipline towards the benefit of the human being with one theistic belief of the Oneness of God even in death's contemplation. Western contemplation of death in Heidegger has led to dare-adventures and passionate lives without limitations and boundaries living a passionate life in this world with their potentialities. This passionate living evokes the fear of death and negation of any chances of an afterlife. Islam, on the other hand, proposes to live a life than to survive it.

Conclusion

Whether one views death as an extension of life based on existence in this world (as in the hereafter from the religious perspective), or considers it to be an inevitable possibility associated with Dasein's Being-towards –death, it is an inescapable fact that the even the

philosophical search for an explanation of death is a subtle attempt at giving meaning to life. Why do we live? Why do we suffer the ultimate loss of our existence – in death? When we die, does it mean the end of an individual's existence/being, or is it just another experience? For, we cannot possibly experience our own death and still be there to complete the analysis. The concept of death presented in Western philosophical tradition, as represented by Heidegger, raises as many questions as it answers. The elaborate maze of terminologies woven around death still confuses the uninitiated. We cannot but assume that it is a cold, pessimistic and despairing existence if eventually all will come to naught.

Although death is a universal experience, it is also very personal. It is not an equivalent experience for every individual because "the equality of men is a spiritual and not a natural, physical, or intellectual fact" in forms of "a moral quality of man, as the human dignity, or as the equal value of the human personality." The Islamic perspective of death, especially by taking away the individual's right of ending his/her own life, and a firm belief in the hereafter, is a departure from the calculated analysis of the Western tradition. One may criticize it for its simplicity but it is a worldview that places every aspect of existence and non-existence in a certain perspective. Whether one agrees with it is another question but the Islamic perspective is devoid of the gloom and pessimism that one finds in existentialist concepts of death. The Muslim does not fear death, not in the stoical sense that welcomes death as a relief from life, but because actions here define existence in the hereafter. In this sense, it is a more positive concept.

An understanding of the true nature of death that is universally acceptable is still missing. Death is either materialistic, spiritualistic, an experience, a fling of feeling or the kaput of natural elements' dissolution from the body. Today, both civilizational views differ on the personal intensity of death's experience, but both consider it as a painful experience, more or less.

Endnotes

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